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FM AMCONSUL LAGOS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7806  
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHUJA/AMEMBASSY ABUJA PRIORITY 7742  
RUEHAR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA PRIORITY 1255  
RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY 0166  
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS PRIORITY 0372  
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR PRIORITY 0798  
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY 1133  
RULSDMK/DEPT OF TRANSPORTATION WASHDC PRIORITY

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STATE PASS FAA FOR ACONLEY,  
TRANSPORTATION FOR FAA  
DAKAR PLEASE PASS TO FAA REP ED JONES;  
ROME PLEASE PASS TO TSA REP JOHN HALINSKI

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [EAIR](#) [EINV](#) [ASEC](#) [NI](#)  
SUBJECT: PORT HARCOURT INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT CLOSED

REF: LAGOS 1049

¶1. (U) According to the Director General of the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA), Port Harcourt International Airport will close immediately for runway repairs. These repairs will take until late December, predicted NCAA Director General Harold Demuren. This closure occurs two months earlier than the original October time frame announced by NCAA. Demuren said the early closure was precipitated by complaints from Air France to the International Air Transport Association (IATA) over the deteriorating runway conditions. Demuren said domestic flights will be redirected to Owerri, Calabar, and Osubi airports with the smaller planes directed to Port Harcourt's military airport. He stated that intercontinental flights would be redirected to Lagos or Abuja.

¶2. (U) Nigerian Airspace Management Agency (NAMA) Director General, Roland Iyayi, confirmed to us that Air France's complaints to IATA was the proximate cause of the shut-down. Runway repairs will likely take a minimum of four months to complete, and aviation experts do not expect the Airport to reopen until late December. The sudden closure comes at a delicate time, drawing negative attention before the expected November arrival of International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) auditors to Nigeria, he chimed.

¶3. (U) All international and domestic flights to and from Port Harcourt are now cancelled, according to Bellview Airlines CEO Kayode Odukoya. Odukoya said Bellview would not fly to Owerri, Calabar or Osubi airports. Owerri Airport does not meet its safety requirements, and Calabar and Osubi airports cannot accomodate the larger aircrafts used by Bellview.

¶4. (U) Embassy Abuja has heard conflicting reasons for the closure and different estimates about its duration. The Nigerian Air Force Director of Operations claims the closure was temporary due to an unexplained technical fire. (Comment: We take this explanation as less than authoritative. End comment.)

¶5. (U) Over-land travel is dangerous, and U.S. companies have security concerns regarding overland travel from Port Harcourt to Owerri. Post has sent out a warden message regarding the airport closure.

16. (SBU) Comment: The airport closure affects all airlines flying to and from Port Harcourt, including several U.S. oil majors and service companies operating in the oil-rich Niger Delta. The sudden closure of the Port Harcourt International Airport and the inadequacy of the nearby airports to absorb the routine air traffic from this airport will disrupt travel to the area significantly. End comment.

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